

# 1

## Dark Eve

[Elizabeth Parris, wife of the Reverend Samuel Parris,] emerges as a good-hearted woman, simple and ineffectual, who saw her job in Salem Village as a continuing round of errands to and for the wives in the parish. But in her busy effort to bolster her husband's acceptance in the village, she absented herself more and more from home. Into this void, necessarily, moved Tituba, and from Tituba came the tales that excited Abigail and frightened Betty.

– James F. Droney, “The Witches of Salem”<sup>1</sup>

### I

In the beginning there was Tituba: a woman who, according to the politics of the early 1960s, gained power because a working mother paid insufficient attention to her family. Although chroniclers of Salem's story vary in their explanations of her presence, Tituba appears in the overwhelming number of narrations as the central figure in the genesis of the witch trials. Her entrance onto the historical stage, in her precipitating role of beginning the witchcraft, receives its modern codification in the account by Charles W. Upham, whose *Salem Witchcraft*, published in 1867,<sup>2</sup> has served as the most influential work in shaping subsequent myth and history related to the Salem witch trials.

Upham offers a speculation that Tituba and her husband John, slaves of the Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village, brought with them “the wild and strange superstitions prevalent among their native tribes, materials which, added to the commonly received notions on such subjects,

heightened the infatuation of the times, and inflamed still more the imaginations of the credulous." He suggests that they brought with them "systems of demonology" consistent "with ideas and practices developed here." A group consisting primarily of "a circle of young girls" along with these two slaves met regularly in the Parris household, and from these meetings came the strange practices that eventually became defined as witchcraft.<sup>3</sup>

From Upham's association of Tituba and John with the genesis of the witchcraft accusations, a tradition grew that somewhere along the way transformed from speculation to fact. In most accounts, the role of John slips away as Tituba becomes the central, generating figure in the origins of the witch-hunt. No historical evidence supports this role assigned to Tituba, yet its tenacious hold among popularizers and even many scholars remains unshaken.

In one of the most popular modern accounts of what happened at Salem, Marion Starkey's 1949 *The Devil in Massachusetts*, Starkey writes how

Tituba yielded to the temptation to show the children tricks and spells, fragments of something like voodoo remembered from the Barbados. . . . It is possible that history would never have heard of Abigail and Betty [the two children first afflicted] . . . had they kept Tituba to themselves. But that they could not do. Tituba's fascination was too powerful to be monopolized by two small girls. Thanks to her, the parsonage kitchen presently became a rendezvous for older girls in the neighborhood.

Evoking the metaphor of a "fatal spark," Starkey writes, "It was given Tituba to strike it."<sup>4</sup>

In the realm of major scholars, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum similarly use the image of the "spark" in seeing Tituba as one of the precipitating agents in a cluster of causes that led to the Salem witch trials. They link Tituba's "voodoo lore" with "an intense group of adolescent girls" interested "in fortune telling and the occult."<sup>5</sup> Kai Erikson, in his *Wayward Puritans*, insinuates the guilt of Tituba even as he acknowledges that "No one really knows how the witchcraft hysteria began." He then proceeds to explain how

In early 1692, several girls from the neighborhood began to spend their afternoons in the Parris kitchen with a slave named Tituba, and it was not long before a mysterious sorority of girls, aged between nine and twenty, became regular visitors to the parsonage. We can only speculate what was going on behind the kitchen door, but we know that

Tituba had been brought to Massachusetts from Barbados and enjoyed a reputation in the neighborhood for her skills in the magic arts.<sup>6</sup>

More cautiously approaching the subject, Chadwick Hansen, in his iconoclastic *Witchcraft at Salem*, cites tradition as placing Tituba in the role of assisting in “occult experiments,” but raises no questions about the tradition.<sup>7</sup>

We see the story again in Selma and Pamela Williams’s *Riding the Night Mare*, as the authors describe how “in the dark of the night [Tituba] gave lessons in chanting and dancing to gain mysterious powers.”<sup>8</sup> In 1983 the Essex Institute, with the best library holdings in the world on the subject, published a pamphlet entitled *The Salem Witchcraft Trials*. At first it approaches the Tituba story tentatively, suggesting it as a possibility; but soon the tale possesses the writer, and we read about “Tituba’s vivid stories of sorcery and the black arts,” which “*doubtless* provided an enthralling if impious outlet for the repressed adolescent feelings and imaginations of the young people” (my emphasis).<sup>9</sup> In present-day Danvers, Massachusetts – previously known as Salem Village, where the outbreak originally occurred – a historical marker with the following inscription stands at the excavation of the Salem Village Parsonage:

It was in this house in 1692 that Tituba, Rev. Parris’ slave, told the girls of the household stories of witchcraft which nurtured the village witchcraft hysteria. . . .<sup>10</sup>

The sin of Tituba is for all posterity to see.

The Tituba myth appeared on television in the PBS film *Three Sovereigns for Sarah: A True Story*,<sup>11</sup> and reappears fairly regularly at Halloween, as in this excerpt from a Gannett newspaper:

It is a tale fit for a campfire. The winter of 1692 was long and cold in New England. In the Puritan settlement of Salem, townsfolk lived in icy fear, for they believed they were wrestling their new lives from a land that had formerly been the devil’s domain. The evil one, they believed, was manifest in the creak of a house, the howl of a wolf, the onset of disease.

In that murky climate of superstition, a group of young girls passed the dreary season by the warm hearth in the house of the Rev. Mr. Samuel Parris. There Tituba, a slave from Barbados, enthralled them with stories of voodoo, of seeing the devil dance round a bonfire. She may have told their fortunes or hypnotized some of the younger girls. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the story finds its way into a “Dear Steve” column in the New York *Daily News*; but Tituba’s burden also crops up in more middle-

brow publications, such as *Newsweek*, *Smithsonian*, and *Harvard Magazine*.<sup>13</sup> A recent American scholarly work carries the story as fact; in England, Tituba as teller of voodoo tales appears in a book that uses the Salem witch trials metaphorically regarding accusations of child abuse.<sup>14</sup> Why the continuing appeal of this fiction? Archetypally, the story works around the notion of original sin, the telling of evil stories rather than the eating of an apple or the opening of a box. In a land popularly imagined as born in religious freedom, a place of harmony where settlers and "Indians" ate turkey together, the Salem witch trials have served mythically as a national fall, as disruptive to the idyllic myth of America as is the seduction of Eve to the myth of Eden.

That the role of precipitating agent for this American fall should rest upon a woman is consistent with the archetype it perpetuates. That the woman should be dark reflects America's social engagement with the seemingly intractable problem of synthesizing a myth of national harmony with Indian wars and with slavery. The defeated groups in this war of color become merged into an ambiguously pigmented Tituba, at times "Indian" and at times "Negro."

In a valuable survey of the racial representation of Tituba, Chadwick Hansen has shown how this Indian woman emerged over the years as a half Indian, half black person, finally becoming entirely black in the hands of modern writers, from distinguished playwright to distinguished scholar.<sup>15</sup> Although no one race or color consistently defines her, Tituba remains in our mythology as the dark woman, the alien, who enters the Puritan world and plunges it into chaos. The myth of dark Tituba recapitulates with an American tint the myth of original sin, the archetypal tale of the woman as progenitor of evils to come.

Tituba fits easily enough into American stereotypes. On August 6, 1910, at an event memorializing one of the witch-trial victims, Carolus M. Cobb described how Tituba and John taught their knowledge of "Voodooism, or whatever name one chooses to call that form of mimetic magic which is practiced among the negroes of the south. All races of that order of intelligence [*sic*] originate certain forms of magic. . . ."<sup>16</sup> This view of Tituba, generally implicit, finds further explicit representation in Sidney Perley's standard *History of Salem Massachusetts*, published in 1924: "Like the colored race generally, and especially of the tropics, Tituba was a believer in the occult, and delighted in the exploitation of the mysterious and wonderful."<sup>17</sup> While contemporary perpetuators of the Tituba myth deplore such stereotypes, the unexamined roots of their representations unwittingly reside in these older beliefs.

If it remains unnecessary to belabor the racial and gender implications

of Tituba as author of sin, the credibility of the actual story warrants a brief consideration in view of its persistence. Inevitably, those who believe that where there is smoke there is fire will be leery of the notion that the role of Tituba was created out of whole cloth: It was by the smoke-and-fire theory, of course, that authorities hanged people in 1692. Could it be true, however, that Tituba actually presided over a circle of girls, telling the stories she is accused of telling, and that the archetype is a coincidence, fortuitous in mythmaking about Salem? Is there a remarkable convergence of myth and history? Not if one follows reasonable rules of evidence: In the enormous quantity of data available for examining the Salem witch trials – in all the court records, in all pretrial and trial testimony (contrary to what various historians claim, some trial records did survive),<sup>18</sup> in all the contemporary accounts of what happened – not a single person suggests that Tituba told stories of witchcraft or voodoo. Not one person hints at it or says anything that could be misconstrued to imply it. When in 1692 Cotton Mather wrote his official version of the trials, “Wonders of the Invisible World,” nothing of the tale appeared. When Robert Calef in 1700 published his response to Mather, “More Wonders of the Invisible World,” nothing of this story was told. When John Hale gave his account in “A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,”<sup>19</sup> he offered an account of fortune-telling that future mythologizers associated with Tituba; but Hale himself made no such association. When Thomas Hutchinson published his *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay* in 1764,<sup>20</sup> the work from which the nineteenth-century accounts generally grew, he told nothing of this version of the Tituba story. Not until the nineteenth century does the story flower. At first we see phrases such as “tradition has it that Tituba . . .”; and although this qualification still appears at times, writers more often than not represent the story as true, with tradition transferred to fact.

Tituba did play a role, of course – making lurid claims about witchcraft at her examination and confessing her own guilt – but nothing she said offers a basis for the legend about her that most scholars have related as fact. Nor did her confession represent the turning point in legitimizing the witchcraft claims: This came instead from Sarah Good, the first of the three women to be interrogated in Salem Village on March 1, 1692.

## II

The legal phase of the Salem witch trials began on February 29 with warrants for the arrest of Tituba, Sarah Osborne, and Sarah Good, all three from Salem Village. Each was accused of afflicting Betty Parris and

Abigail Williams, whose behavior had evoked memories of the Goodwin children's afflictions. Added to Betty and Abigail, however, were two new names: Ann Putnam, Jr., 12, and Elizabeth Hubbard, probably 17, although sometimes described in court documents as 16 and sometimes as 18.<sup>21</sup> Who among them, if any, originally accused the three women remains unknown; all but Betty Parris became frequent accusers of others. The actual complaint in the warrants of February 29 came from Joseph Hutchinson, Thomas Putnam, Edward Putnam, and Thomas Preston. The men alleged that the afflictions had been occurring for the previous two months.

Elizabeth Hubbard was the niece of a physician, Dr. William Griggs, and lived in his house.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Putnam was the father of Ann; as the witch-hunt expanded, his name was to appear on roughly 10 percent of all warrants identifying a complainer. Edward Putnam was to offer only three other complaints, one against the child of Sarah Good. Thomas Preston made no further recorded complaints; nor did Joseph Hutchinson, although he did subsequently allege that Abigail Williams had stated her comfort with the devil, and he subsequently signed a petition on behalf of another accused woman, Rebecca Nurse. Betty Parris was a witness at the hearings held in early March for the three accused women; thereafter, she probably participated in no further judicial procedures. Ann Putnam, Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Hubbard were to play major roles in the events that developed.

On March 1, the three accused women were examined on the charges brought against them. Sarah Good soon offered confirmation of witchcraft, since in defending herself she chose to accuse Sarah Osborne of afflicting the accusers. This decision by Sarah Good gave immediate credibility to the charges of witchcraft and set in motion a process that led to her own execution. Of the three women examined on March 1, she was the only one who would die on the gallows. Sarah Osborne died in prison on May 10 (*SWP* III: 954). Tituba spent time in prison and was subsequently released.

Among the audience in the house of Nathaniel Ingersoll, where the examination of Sarah Good was held, were the four individuals named in the warrant as afflicted. The magistrates were John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin, with Hathorne apparently asking all the questions. His first question set the tone of the examination as accusatory. In subsequent examinations, Hathorne occasionally varied from this beginning, expressing his hope that the person could prove innocence; not so with Sarah Good, nor with most of the people he questioned. "Sarah Good what evil spirit have you familiarity with[?]" Good denied that she had any or that she was

in any way hurting the “poor children” who were behaving as if she were tormenting them during the examination (*SWP* II: 356). Halfway through the examination there was still no substantiation from anyone that witchcraft played a role in the behavior of the “afflicted”; but Sarah Good abruptly gave the afflicted the corroboration they needed when she identified Sarah Osborne as their tormentor. The first legal testimony supporting the presence of witchcraft had been made. When Osborne took the stand, she accused no one. Tituba, however, confessed and accused them both.

Sarah Good – at the examination on March 1, in subsequent examinations, and at her trial – was named by a variety of people as an afflicting witch. Among her accusers was her daughter Dorcas. Her husband, William, while not specifically accusing her of witchcraft, offered hostile testimony against her, including an insinuation that she might have a witch mark, where the devil’s familiar suckled (*SWP* II: 363). The testimony against Sarah Good at her examination, as well as at her trial at the end of June, would be typical of the patterns developing in other cases. The magistrates would question the accused, and during the questioning those claiming to be afflicted would assert that the person being examined was at that very moment tormenting them. The accused would then be sent to jail and usually put in chains. Subsequently, at a grand jury hearing, or at the trial, depositions would be given against the accused. Charges here came from individuals other than the original accusers, as members of the community came forward to describe real, imagined, or fabricated offenses by the accused. Their testimony seems sometimes honest, sometimes confused, and sometimes conspiratorial.

Among those giving depositions, genuine belief in the demonic powers of the accused often played a part, as it may have in the reports that Sarah Good caused cows to die, as attested by Samuel and Mary Abbey (*SWP* II: 368), Thomas and Sarah Gage (*SWP* II: 369), and Henry Herrick and Jonathan Batchelor (*SWP* II: 375). Their testimony has no element of magic about it; that is, they report no invisible phenomena. A quarrel occurs, cows die around that time, and a correlation is drawn. Yet the dying-cow stories from the Abbeys, the Gages, and Herrick and Batchelor introduce another element that would loom large in the Salem story: They refer to events of the past. Those cows had died two or three years earlier. In some cases, testimony would be based on events happening twenty years before. Such depositions were legally accepted and suggest no particular misconduct on the part of judicial authorities in receiving them; but their unreliability helped build some of Salem’s core myths.

Depositional testimony also offers instances of how people seem simply

to have been duped. For example, on June 28 William Batten, William Shaw, and his wife Deborah Shaw testified that they had discovered 18-year-old accuser Susannah Sheldon with her hands tied. Unable to loosen the knot, they had had to cut the string that bound her. Susannah Sheldon claimed that the specters of Sarah Good and Lydia Dustin, both then in prison, had tied her up on that occasion and on others, and that when Susannah touched the string that bound her, Sarah Good would bite her. Batten and the Shaws also testified that, invisible to them, a broom had been carried out of the house and put in an apple tree, and that a shirt, a milk tube, and three poles had invisibly been removed from the house to the woods (*SWP* II: 370–1). There seems no reasonable possibility to explain Susannah Sheldon's conduct other than fraud. Hysteria might make her imagine spirits attacking her, but it cannot tie her up in a knot so tight that others need a knife to free her. As for the invisible disappearances, the items had either been removed by spirits or by cooperating conspirators, whether as pranks or for more serious reasons. In this case, it appears as if there were three dupes and at least one accomplice to Susannah Sheldon.

Other kinds of lurid allegations emerged. Constable Joseph Herrick testified (with the corroboration of his wife Mary) that, instructed to bring Sarah Good to the jail at Ipswich, he had placed her under guard in his own home. The three guards informed him in the morning that Sarah Good, barefooted and barelegged, had disappeared from them “for some time” (*SWP* II: 370). Herrick was subsequently informed that on the night of March 1, with Good under guard at his house, she had tormented Elizabeth Hubbard. Samuel Sibley, the man guarding Elizabeth Hubbard, had struck at the spectral Sarah Good, though without seeing or feeling anything: Only accusers being tormented could see their tormentors, a phenomenon called “spectral evidence.” Elizabeth Hubbard, according to Herrick's testimony, had assured Sibley that he had struck Sarah Good on the arm. Moreover, Mary Herrick testified that on the morning of March 2 she saw one of Good's arms bloody from around the elbow to the wrist. As with the Susannah Sheldon episode, some combination of conspiracy and gullibility appears to explain the events.

Our choices for accounting for such testimony are fairly limited. If we exclude the possibility that an invisible Sarah Good went after Elizabeth Hubbard and took a blow from Samuel Sibley that caused her arm to bleed, and that this same invisible woman did not have the sense to get out of town, we are left with collusion of some kind or with an astonishing set of coincidences – or with the possibility that Elizabeth Hubbard somehow found out about an injury to Sarah Good's arm and staged an

attack that would implicate her. Although hysteria could account for Elizabeth Hubbard seeing apparitions, it could not account for her awareness of Sarah Good's injured arm. A long tradition of popular and scholarly literature has argued for, or assumed, hysteria as offering the broadest explanation of the Salem witch trials; but too much happened that cannot be explained by hysteria.

This does not mean, however, that no hysteria occurred, and often we are forced to choose between hysteria and fraud. Yet one of the odd facts about Salem's story is that although most renditions of it evoke hysterical females reacting in court to imagined specters tormenting them, males frequently give more plausible indications of hysteria, because their behavior often occurs without evidence of the demonstrable fraud of women such as Elizabeth Hubbard or Susannah Sheldon. Such cases usually involve accounts of one-time experiences that might plausibly be explained by hysteria. Thus, on March 5 William Allen and John Hughes testify that on the night of March 1 they saw a beast transform into two or three women who they assumed to be Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba. Other than accusing Sarah Good, Allen's name appears in only one other instance, and this time as a petitioner on behalf of an accused woman, Mary Bradbury. John Hughes makes only one other charge, a claim that on March 2 a great white dog followed him and then disappeared, and that that night in bed he saw a great light and a cat at the foot of his bed.<sup>23</sup> Although this testimony appears with the materials against Sarah Good, Hughes himself makes no charge that she had anything to do with his bedtime experiences. William Allen, on the other hand, says that on March 2 Sarah Good and an unusual light appeared to him in his bedroom. Good sat on his foot, and when he tried to kick her, she and the light disappeared. If the testimony of Allen and Hughes is fraudulent, one cannot infer it clearly as one can in the case of Elizabeth Hubbard or Susannah Sheldon; thus the idea of hysteria is plausible for them in a way that it is not for the two young women.

Behavior by some women, of course, could plausibly be attributed to hysteria, as in the case of Johanna Childin. She claimed that on June 2 Sarah Good and a deceased child of Good appeared to her, with the child accusing its mother of murdering it and with Good admitting the crime and saying she gave the child to the devil. However, such a tale could also simply be a fabrication, and whether Childin's testimony represents hysteria or collusion is difficult to tell: She testified in only one other case, describing the appearance of an apparition confessing murder. Still, as the pattern would develop, men were more likely than women to be one- or two-time reporters of extraordinary phenomena.

If some testimony seems hysterically derived, and other conspiratorial, some simply leaves us guessing about inconsistencies. The testimony of the Herricks and Sarah Good's bloody arm offers the most conspicuous instance of this in the Good case. Elizabeth Hubbard's testimony is consistent with what the Herricks say about Sibley striking Good, but Sibley himself tells a slightly different story. He says that Hubbard had told him that Good was barebreasted – a sight that surely should have evoked some comment in the testimony of Hubbard or the Herricks. Moreover, Sibley says he had hit Good – according to Hubbard, since he could not see what if anything he was hitting – on the back so forcefully that he had almost killed Good: on the *back*, not the arm, as the Herricks and Elizabeth Hubbard reported. Hubbard simply did not offer consistent accounts of her encounter with the invisible world. If her inconsistency troubled others, no evidence of this survives.

### III

What was on the mind of John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin on March 1, 1692, can only be the subject of speculation. Assuming that they believed in witchcraft and that as honest men they sought to determine fairly whether the evidence against the accused women was sufficient to bring them to trial, what might they reasonably infer? Much of the testimony against Sarah Good would be damning if credited, although stories about the killing of cows did not come until later in the proceedings. Similarly, the inconsistency in connection with Sibley's attack on the apparition of Sarah Good appeared in subsequent depositional testimony. Still, in their presence on March 1, Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubbard expressed their claims of great agony, complaining that the women were torturing them.

For these two justices of the peace, assuming them fair and impartial, a moment of truth must have confronted them early in the proceedings. For this we turn to the account of John Hale, a minister whose description of the occurrences at Salem serves as one of the key documents from a contemporary and a participant in the events. Hale, who would eventually criticize the proceedings in general, nevertheless accepted the idea that witchcraft was occurring and that the "Children" were suffering. At one point he refers to "pins invisibly stuck into their flesh."<sup>24</sup> Hale's observation almost certainly refers to Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, whose original behavior precipitated conclusions of witchcraft. His reference is to events before the examination on March 1, but at that examination Sarah Good was accused of hurting the children in the presence of the

justices as well as earlier. In other cases, clear evidence exists that accusers were claiming to be tormented by pins being stuck in them and were showing the magistrates the pins. If we may speculate that the pins also appeared in them in the presence of the justices at the examinations of March 1, or that the justices had heard about the pins earlier, Hathorne and Corwin quickly had some limited choices. Pins are visible and tangible: They are stuck in a person or not, and something puts them in the person. The justices had to choose between the accusers having inserted pins in themselves and witches having done the job. In her children's book, *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, Shirley Jackson highlights these two alternatives and clearly points to fraud.<sup>25</sup> Not so the justices: They opted for witches. If we can understand the decision of Hathorne and Corwin in the context of another era, it is more difficult to understand the views of scholars who believe that the conduct of the children stemmed from hallucinations or hysteria, theories that do not plausibly account for the accusers bringing and using the pins they claimed the witches employed to attack them, as Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, and others maintained. Not having modern psychological theories to assess, Hathorne and Corwin made their decision. When Sarah Osborne's turn came, the mind-set of the judges was evident enough: They had chosen witchcraft as the only plausible alternative to fraud in the matter of pins.

Sarah Osborne came before the judges not simply accused by the four represented in the original complaint, but now by Sarah Good also. The documentation on Sarah Osborne is slim, probably because she never came to trial, dying in prison on May 10. Acknowledging the concept of witchcraft, she denied that she herself was a witch; nor did she implicate any others. Osborne raised the theological point that the devil could take the shape of others, an argument that would persist in the debate against spectral evidence. She also suggested that she herself had been attacked by the devil, a claim that failed to impress the justices.

Because Sarah Osborne was not indicted, a comparison of her case with Sarah Good's comes to a halt, except in striking similarity on two points. As in the case of Good, Osborne's husband gave damaging testimony against his wife, telling the justices that she had not been to church for a year and two months. The other similarity is this issue of church attendance, since Sarah Good also admitted to having missed church regularly. Indeed, it was this lack of church attendance more than any other factor that the women held in common – that and the use of their husbands' testimony against them. Sarah Good was 38, pregnant, and a pauper; Osborne was 60 and a woman with property, though involved in land disputes.<sup>26</sup>

## IV

By the time Tituba took the stand, the pattern of examination was in place: A justice would ask a hostile question, such as Why do you hurt the children?, and the accused was presumed guilty from the outset. Attempts at denial led to noisy fits and accusations by those claiming to be afflicted. Sarah Good had already given the accusers legitimacy, but without detailed accounts of how witches conducted their activities. Tituba filled this void in confessing and offering lurid tales about flying on broomsticks and other adventures with compatriot witches. As to their identity, however, she named only Good and Osborne. Nevertheless, her confession, the first in the witchcraft episode, following the claim of Sarah Good that Sarah Osborne was a witch, solidified the credibility of the accusers and their tales.

At the outset of her interrogation, Tituba flatly denied hurting the children or being a witch. Very quickly, though, she shifted her way of answering and told everything and nothing. She said four women had hurt the children, but she named only Good and Osborne. She said the night before she had been at Boston and had seen a tall man, but she named no man. She admitted hurting the children because she had been threatened if she did not, but said she would do it no more. She said a man appeared to her like a hog and a dog and told her to serve him. The dog was black. Then it turned into a man with a yellow bird. Throughout the trials and examinations, reference would be made to this yellow bird. She saw a red rat and a black rat. She said the yellow bird accompanied Sarah Good. She said she saw a thing with two legs, a head like a woman, and wings. Abigail Williams interjected that she also had seen this and had seen it turn into Sarah Osborne, a point Tituba had not made. What else had Tituba seen with Osborne? Tituba, who was giving the examiners whatever they wanted, except for new names, complied. She saw an upright hairy thing with only two legs that was like a man. Had she seen Sarah Good on Elizabeth Hubbard last Saturday? She said she saw a wolf set upon Elizabeth Hubbard. Elizabeth Hubbard then complained about a wolf. Tituba did not stop with that. She said she saw a cat with Good on another occasion. Hathorne switched away from rats and cats and wolves and dogs in search of identifying witches. What clothes does the man wear, he asked her. He wears black clothes, she said. He's a tall man with white hair. "How doth the woman go?" What woman is unclear, but Tituba had no problem with the question. She had a white hood and a black hood and a "tup knot" (*SWP* III: 749). Hathorne wanted to know who was hurting the children at that very moment. Sarah Good, Tituba replied. And who hurts

them now, Hathorne wanted to know. Tituba announced that she was now blind, and the questioning stopped.

A second version exists of Tituba's examination on March 1. Some of it repeats the same story, but new ingredients do appear. The night before, as she was washing the room, she had seen four witches, two of whom were Good and Osborne, hurting the children. No one asked her to explain how she had been washing the room if she had been in Boston. The witches, moreover, had threatened to take her to Boston, and had threatened the children with death. The man was with the four women. The three people whom Tituba could not identify were all from Boston. No one asked how she knew this. She saw two cats: one red, and one black and as big as a little dog. What did the cats do? Tituba did not know. Had the cats hurt or threatened her? They had scratched her. What had they wanted of her? They had wanted her to hurt the children. They had forced her to pinch the children. Did the cats suck Tituba? No, she would not let them. She went on different trips by broom with Good and Osborne to pinch Elizabeth Hubbard and Ann Putnam. Good and Osborne told her she had to kill someone, and those two wanted her to kill Ann Putnam last night.

Ann Putnam joined in to affirm Tituba's story, adding that the witches wanted her to cut her own throat, and if she did not Tituba would cut her head off. If Hathorne or Corwin wondered why Ann survived, they were silent on this. The Reverend Parris did ask for more information about the whole matter, but Tituba said she could not tell, because if she did her head would be cut off. Her interrogator asked who had made such threats. The man, Tituba says, along with Good and Osborne. Tituba changed the subject: The previous night Good had come with her yellow bird. The accusers joined in that they too had seen a yellow bird, and Tituba had seen it suck Sarah Good's right hand. Had Tituba ever practiced witchcraft in her own country? Never. Also, Sarah Good has a cat in addition to a yellow bird. What does Osborne have? A thing that is hair all over, with a long nose, a face she cannot describe, two legs; it goes upright and is about three feet tall. Who was the wolf who appeared to Elizabeth Hubbard? Sarah Good. What clothing was the man wearing who appeared to Tituba? Sometimes black clothes and sometimes a "Serge Coat" of another color – a tall man with white hair (*SWP* III: 752). What did the woman wear? Tituba did not know the color. What kind of clothes did she have? Tituba did not know the color. She was asked a third time: What kind of clothes did the woman have? She had a black silk hood with a white silk hood under it, with top knots; a woman she did not know, although she had seen her in Boston. What clothes did the little woman have?

A serge coat and a white cap. The accusers were having fits, and Tituba was asked who was doing it. Sarah Good, and the accusers confirmed it – except for Elizabeth Hubbard, who was in an extreme fit and said they had blinded her.

On March 2, Tituba was examined again in prison. This time she described a green and white bird, but it never caught on: The yellow bird would prevail. She told of a man who had come to her and asked her to serve him. On a Friday morning he had showed her a book. Was it a big book or a little book? The motif of the book would continue throughout the witchcraft episode, the devil looking for a signature of alliance. Tituba did not know the size of the book. She said he would not show it to her; he had had it in his pocket. Nobody asked how he could have showed her a book that he did not show her. Did he make you write your name in the book? Not yet, said Tituba; her mistress had called her into another room. What did the man say you had to do with the book? Write my name in it. Did you? Yes, once I made a mark in the book in red blood. Did he get the blood out of your body? He said he would get it out the next time and gave a pin tied to a stick for the deed to be done later. Did you see other marks in his book? Tituba had seen many. Some red, some yellow. Did he tell you the names? Only two, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. How many marks were there? Nine. Did they write their names? They made marks, Tituba answered. She said Good told her she had made her mark, but Osborne would not tell. When did Good tell you? The same day I came here to prison. Did you see the man that morning? Yes, he told me the magistrates were going to examine me, that I was to tell nothing or else my head would be cut off. You say there were nine names; did he tell you the names of the others? No, but he said I would see them next time. What did you see? A man, a dog, a hog, two cats, one black and one red, and the strange monster, the hairy imp with Osborne; the man offered it to me, but I would not have it. Did he show you in the book which marks belonged to Good and Osborne? Yes. Did he tell you the names of the others? No. Did he tell you where the nine lived? Yes. Some in Boston and some in this town.

Tituba held firm. While describing a lurid world of witchcraft, she had resisted broadening the net of accusations. She would produce no new names. In 1700 Robert Calef published his “More Wonders of the Invisible World” and reported there that Tituba’s confession had resulted from beatings and other abuse from her master, the Reverend Samuel Parris.<sup>27</sup> In 1692, a woman delegated to search her body for evidence of demonic familiars suckling her found “upon her body the marks of the Devils wounding of her.”<sup>28</sup> No one else seems to have been suspected, and Titu-

ba could have little hope of legal protection from abusive treatment. Instead, she would have every reason to follow the advice heard in Ann Petry's fictional depiction of her life. Here, her husband John tells her, "Remember, always remember, the slave must survive. No matter what happens to the master, the slave must survive."<sup>29</sup> Tituba was a survivor. It is hard to imagine that she felt any sense of obligation to the white society she served. She may even have used her plight to take revenge against the society that had enslaved her, as Maryse Condé writes in her stunning novel, *I, Tituba*.<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not she had revenge in mind, however, Tituba answered the questions with a cautious strategy: She has nothing to tell her interrogators, but she knows that she must tell them what they want to hear. So she feels her way. If they ask her something often enough, she complies. She does this in everything except in giving names. Doing so might have produced names they would not accept, and perhaps her troubles would have deepened; with Good and Osborne she was safe. They wanted more witches, she would give them more. She could hide behind the magic properties of the invisible world to play the game as safely as possible. Like Osborne, she told of her own affliction, complaining, as Hale reports, "of her fellow Witches tormenting of her" for having confessed.<sup>31</sup> By shrewdness or by luck, she had discovered the protection to be found in confession and in claims of her own affliction in retaliation for her cooperation. Whatever else we may guess about her, Tituba was not hysterical. Her answers were well measured in response to the questions asked of her in a room containing hostile magistrates, screaming people claiming to be afflicted, and a crowd of villagers watching the event unfold.

What should reasonable men make of such a tale in 1692? Hathorne and Corwin heard Tituba's story at a time when claims of supernatural powers for witches was a contested issue. Fifteen years earlier, John Webster in England had written a devastating critique of supposed witchcraft activity,<sup>32</sup> and in 1692 Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* had been produced in England. The play had its controversies, and the witches in it were real; but Shadwell ridiculed witchcraft and wrote scathingly in his note to the reader that if he had not depicted witches as real, he "would have been call'd Atheistical, By a prevailing party who take it that the power of the Devil should be lessened, and attribute more miracles to a silly old Woman, than ever they did to the greatest of Prophets, and by this means the Play might have been Silenced."<sup>33</sup> While this indeed suggests the strength of a party that believed in the powers of witches, it also makes clear the contested nature of the issue. In England enough freedom existed to express such skepticism, as shown by Webster and Shadwell.

Cotton Mather would not have written so obsessively on behalf of the existence of his invisible world if some universal view of the subject had existed. So those commentators on Salem who claim that the events happened in the context of an English-speaking world that accepted without question the notion of witchcraft – and these include most of those who have written on Salem – have simply perpetuated one of the core myths about Salem: that everybody at the time believed in witchcraft or the supernatural power of witches. It was not so.

Still, it was more likely to be so in Massachusetts Bay than in England; but even in the context of their belief in the supernatural power of witches, Hathorne and Corwin had to evaluate Tituba's testimony. The conflicts in it might readily be exposing Tituba as a liar, something reasonably expected from a witch. Why not press her on the contradictions? Had she been in Boston with the witches or had she not? How could she see a book that she had not seen? Possibly the magistrates thought these details were not worth pursuing when what they wanted were names. However, a more complex possibility occurs, one that takes us to the methodological problems of recreating the core events of Salem's story: We may not be reading exactly what Hathorne and Corwin asked, or even exactly what Tituba answered.

*The Salem Witchcraft Papers* offers two versions of Tituba's testimony on March 1. The first was recorded by Ezekial Cheever. We do not know who recorded the second or who recorded the questioning of Tituba in prison. Possibly it was Samuel Parris, who had committed himself to witchcraft as an explanation for the difficulties in his household. Although in Tituba's case no evidence supports suspicions of fabricated testimony, there is reason for questioning transcripts in some other instances. For example, Elizabeth Hubbard's testimony against Sarah Good is signed with Hubbard's mark (*SWP* II: 373), which turns out to be different from the mark given by her in her testimony against Susannah Martin (*SWP* II: 575). Since people customarily had their own mark, the discrepancy is significant in suggesting that she may not have confirmed the testimony recorded in her name. As we shall see, instances occur where testimony seems simply to have been invented. Fortunately, in spite of the slipperiness of the documentation, plausible decisions as to credibility can be made.

The problem of narration manifests itself in another way. Different people, not necessarily with any attempt to mislead, simply report the events differently. Surviving documentation is often inconsistent, and conclusions often hinge on a best guess. The story of Salem Village's "witch cake" nicely illustrates the issue. Perhaps no other cake in American histo-

ry has had so much written about it. This was the cake made early in the episode, before matters went to the judiciary, to determine who was bewitching the afflicted children. Generally, various versions of this story can be traced back to two differing accounts, one by the Reverend John Hale and one by Robert Calef. Calef says that a few days before March 11 “Mr. Parriss’ Indian Man and Woman made a Cake of Rye Meal, with the Children’s Water, and Baked it in the Ashes, and as is said, gave it to the Dog” to discover witchcraft.<sup>34</sup> Calef, of course, was not there, and his “as is said” suggests that the whole account is removed from anyone of whom Calef himself could be sure. His chronology is demonstrably wrong, since other evidence indicates that the cake appeared before the examinations, which began on March 1.

The Reverend John Hale was in closer contact with those who would have reported the incident, such as the Reverend Samuel Parriss. Hale himself went to see the afflicted girls before the judicial proceedings began. He tells us that the Indian servant and his wife baked the cake from meal and urine of the afflicted. He also tells us that Tituba confessed that she had been taught how to make the cake by her mistress “in her own country[, who] was a witch,” although she herself denied being a witch.<sup>35</sup> At the time, of course, she had not yet been examined; the confession had not yet been elicited.

In 1857, with the publication of the Danvers Church Records, another version came to light. On March 27, the Reverend Samuel Parriss, in a church service, publicly chastised a woman in the congregation, Mary Sibley, wife of the man we recall as swinging away at the invisible Sarah Good. According to Parriss, the activity in connection with the witch cake unleashed the witchcraft in the community. “Nay it never broke forth to any considerable light, untill Diabolical means was used, by the making of a Cake by my Indian man, who had his direction from this our sister Mary Sibly.”<sup>36</sup> Tituba, we notice, is not even mentioned. If we proceed on the notion that Parriss was most likely to know the exact details, and Calef least likely to know, Parriss’s testimony seems safer, particularly because it was publicly stated and easiest to contest. However, the record of this public statement is from Parriss’s own church records, privately written. Parriss is one of the people who would write the records of testimony in the cases, one of the people whose objectivity is certainly suspect. What are we to believe? We are left with best guesses as to what we should credit. Parriss was in the best position to know and, in spite of his editorial biases in transcribing testimony, there really seems no good reason for him to be inaccurate here. However, if Parriss’s account is accurate, Tituba lied to Hale when she said that she had been taught by her mistress in her

former country; for if we believe Parris, it was her husband who had been taught, and by a woman in this country. The cuisine was not unknown in the colony. Rossell Hope Robbins writes:

A contemporary New England almanac gives a recipe: "To cure ague. Take a cake of barley meal and mix it with children's water, bake it, and feed it to the dog. If the dog shakes, you will be cured." Mrs. Sibley may also have hoped that, alternatively, if the dog got sick, the girls would tell who or what afflicted them.<sup>37</sup>

Why would Tituba make up a story about learning this in the Barbados? Perhaps because she told Hale what she thought he wanted to hear. So a story that probably resolves itself as a cake made with a local recipe by John Indian, as he was known, under the direction of Mary Sibley, comes down historically as one made by Tituba using a recipe from the Barbados, with her husband rarely mentioned. As for the dog, mentioned by neither Hale nor Parris, we can only guess, although the New England recipe did call for one.

The secret of Salem will not be unlocked by determining who made the cake, nor by figuring out why the learned ministers seem not to have known a recipe that Mary Sibley knew; but the event offers a useful illustration of the extent to which uncovering what happened in the witchcraft episode becomes a textual problem – one of narration, of weighing competing narratives against each other for their reliability, at getting under the stated texts to the best versions of what might have occurred. To argue for the reliability or unreliability of every passage cited would result in a tome significantly longer than the three-volume *Salem Witchcraft Papers*. Accordingly, this study limits such analysis to selected episodes culled from a close reading of that work.

So we come back for the moment to Hathorne and Corwin hearing the testimony of Tituba, not in the dispassionate way we can analyze it now, but in the context of screaming accusers and terrified observers.

Other magistrates could have been more critical, less inclined to presume guilt as Hathorne clearly was, and as Corwin may have been, although he seems to have let Hathorne do the talking. Furthermore, Hathorne was not taking the traditionally conservative New England approach: Rather than discouraging the naming of others, as Cotton Mather had in the Glover case, Hathorne encouraged it. This radical departure from traditional ways of dealing with witchcraft cases fundamentally set the course for subsequent events.

Of all who faced the judiciary in the witchcraft episode of 1692, only Tituba was indicted through a normal judicial process rather than through

a special Court of Oyer and Terminer that was established later in May. On May 9, 1692, she was indicted by a Court of Assize and General Gaol Delivery in Ipswich. No other person in the whole episode was similarly treated within the normal judicial rules. Her indictment reads as follows:

That Tittapa an Indian Woman Servant to mr Samuel Parris of Salem village in the county of Essex – aforesaid – upon or about the latter end of the yeare 1691 In the Towne of Salem Village afors’d Wickedly & feloniously A Covenant with the Devill did make & Signed the Devills Booke with a marke like A:C by which Wicked Covenanting with the Devill she the Said Tittapa is become A detestable Witch Against the peace of o’r Sov’r lord & lady the King & Queen their Crowne & Dignity & the lawes in that Case made & provided. (SWP III: 755)

This charge against Tituba is consistent with a judicial procedure that, if followed in other cases, would have quickly ended the Salem witch trials. That is, unlike all the other indictments, which based the only specific charges on the claims of the accusers being tormented during judicial proceedings by specters that no one else could see, this indictment is based on the traditional evidence of confession, historically regarded as the most dependable and most reliable of all legal methods of finding witches. That is why in the continental witch trials of the Middle Ages people were systematically tortured, as advocated in Europe’s infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*. When one confronted the invisible world, confession offered the most trusted evidence of witchcraft.

This is one of the points made by Samuel Willard late in 1692 in *Some Miscellany [sic] Observations On Our Present Debates Respecting Witchcrafts*. Only two legal grounds exist for conviction in witchcraft cases, Willard argues: One is a free confession by a mentally competent person; the other is testimony by two “humane witnesses” – that is, witnesses offering testimony on natural, human “Senses” as opposed to claimed divine revelation or “upon the Devils Information.”<sup>38</sup> Within the law as it existed in 1692, Tituba’s confession was “free,” and the indictment against her functioned within the legal tradition that Willard cited, including such authorities as Perkins and Bernard.<sup>39</sup>

The authorities in Massachusetts Bay, however, chose to go outside their normal legal system in all cases except that of Tituba’s. The authorities also chose to ignore the biblical injunction, “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,”<sup>40</sup> by keeping alive those people who confessed to witchcraft. The Salem witch trials are unique in the annals of witchcraft trials in Western civilization for their response to the issue of confession. They simply reversed the traditional rules whereby confessing witches were ex-

ecuted: In Salem, only those who did not confess were executed. Why this strange twist, and why the creation of a special court to handle a legal problem that English courts historically had handled – as, indeed, they had handled Tituba?

The answer most generally given as to why the normal judicial proceedings were not used centers on the chaos of Massachusetts Bay resulting from its lack of a charter. Many explanations for the Salem witch trials have focused on this charter issue, either as creating a situation of great uncertainty that led to instability in the colony, or as creating a form of legal limbo where the authority to prosecute witches did not exist. Boyer and Nissenbaum are the most prominent recent exponents of the view that the colony lacked the legal authority to act prior to the new charter, which Increase Mather brought to the colony on May 14, 1692. According to them,

The basic problem was that while more and more suspected witches and wizards were being arrested, not one trial had yet been held. Indeed, there could be none, for during these months Massachusetts was in the touchy position of being without a legally established government! Eight years earlier, in 1684, its original form of government had been abrogated by the English authorities, and in 1689 the administration with which the King had replaced it was overthrown in a bloodless *coup d'etat*.<sup>41</sup>

There can be no doubt that this legal ambiguity existed. Nevertheless, judicial proceedings were occurring during the period between charters. The courts in cases not related to witchcraft had not gone out of business even though their work was certainly complicated by the ambiguity of the situation. In the witchcraft cases, although there had indeed been no trials before the new charter, there had been plenty of judicial activity. None of the authorities was taking the view that the filled jails were occupied by people put there illegally. Furthermore, there had already been the indictment of Tituba on May 9. The Court of Assize and General Gaol Delivery was functioning in Essex County before the new charter arrived, as were other normal government agencies.<sup>42</sup> The indictment of Tituba, as well as the numerous arrests, offers compelling evidence that the judiciary believed in its legal authority.

Indeed, when in 1689 Massachusetts Bay had found itself in the legally anomalous position of having overthrown Governor Andros and being without a charter, the government in Boston acted decisively to make sure that everyone knew that the laws and the courts would continue no matter what England thought about local authority. As David Konig

points out, fourteen men were speedily condemned to death, eight more than the total number of executions between 1689 and the end of King Philip's War in 1676. Konig writes that "the sentences were unprecedented in Massachusetts judicial history. Although probably only two of the men were executed, the provisional government clearly had demonstrated its powers to all who would question them."<sup>43</sup> Why then the delay in 1692 of the trials' commencement until the arrival of Increase Mather?

The answer here is probably found in a conflict between the magistrates who were jailing the people – Bartholomew Gedney along with Hathorne and Corwin – and the governor, who was opposed to proceeding with indictments in the cases. In an apparent test of wills between the judiciary and the governor, Simon Bradstreet resisted bringing people to trial. Behaving in the traditional New England way, the conservative Bradstreet held the line, and he would do so until the end, until Increase Mather came not just with a new charter, but with a new governor, William Phips.

Increase Mather would emerge as one of the great voices for moderation once the trials began, so it is exquisitely ironic that he brought to power the man who tilted the balance away from the old view, who set up a special court that would have on it some of the very men who had been encouraging the arrest of people as witches.<sup>44</sup> Among others, Phips named to the court Jonathan Corwin, Bartholomew Gedney, and John Hathorne.<sup>45</sup> Thus, three of the nine men named to the court had largely precipitated the crisis by their radical treatment of the cases, and had obviously prejudged the accused. Heading the court was William Stoughton, Phips's lieutenant governor, a man who would cling to his belief in the guilt of people as witches and in the rectitude of the court even after a general consensus had been reached that the court had gone wrong. In months to come, Phips would quarrel with the methods of the court – ironically, a court created by Phips to examine matters that Bradstreet had refused to pursue – and with Stoughton in particular. From the outset, the dice were loaded, and Phips had loaded them. His motives in appointing men who knew something about the outbreak, or simply men of good reputation, may have been purely bureaucratic. If he had other motives, they are not apparent.

Tituba's fate had there been no Court of Oyer and Terminer set up by Phips must remain speculative. Under normal circumstances as a confessing witch she would almost certainly have been tried and hanged in a rare Massachusetts Bay execution for witchcraft.<sup>46</sup> Tituba may have been extraordinarily lucky or extraordinarily shrewd in surviving through the new way, confession. Alternatively, she may have survived simply because she

was property. According to Joseph B. Felt, on June 1, 1692, at the time of the first trial, Parris sold Tituba to pay her jail fees.<sup>47</sup> The new Court of Oyer and Terminer chose to keep Tituba out of the judicial system.

With Phips's court in place, the witch trials of 1692 became almost inevitable. In a further irony, early in the proceedings Phips left the colony to deal with military affairs. This greatly decreased the power of Increase Mather, who was Phips's patron, to moderate the behavior of the court, and greatly increased that of Stoughton. With Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne in prison, the episode that we call the Salem witch trials had begun. Tituba, the slave who found her way to survival, slipped into mythology as the woman who by her tales brought chaos and death to the New World garden.